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POETRY.

For the Literary Transcript.

THE BANDIT BARK.

BY JASPER BERRY, ESQUIRE.

In the far young West, where the pine-wilds flourish
To a leap flows a rushing river;
And it pous its watery thunder down,—
Down, down, descending ever.
On its banks were leasens of strife alight,
And hot blood mantling high,
When a sudden sight did sore affright
Dim midnight's drowsy eye.
A blazing bark pot'd a pale wild gleam
O'er rapid, and wood, and sky;
A bandit crew, by that tyrant stream
Were bore all first wrapp'd by,
And the whirlpools whir'd and the flames 'gan sear
—Woe, woe to those bandit men!
If ever loath'd strife's wild-fire torch,
Methinks they loath'd it then.
On wildly she sped,—on wildly she dash'd,
O'er her billowy way;
A lurid glare, by that tyrant stream
On the cataract's shaft of spray,
Ah! many a day and many a night
Those swarthy rocks had seen;
But never before such a woful sight
As was there that night, I ween.
On to the verge of the cur'd abyss
The bark of the bandits swept,
And down with a roar and a smother'd hiss
The blazing ruin leapt.
Gone was the glare!—'twas night, black night—
The trembling river boom'd on,
The stars above glitter'd gently bright—
So vanish for ever such recreants all!
Let dross Oblivion fling
O'er their names and fancies the ignoble pall
Of her shadowy raven wing!

THE PLACE OF THE PIOUS.

A LEGEND OF MOUNT ETNA.

For some years before that terrible eruption which wrapped Catania in a sheet of fire, two young gentlemen, Tomaso and Antonio by name, distinguished themselves for their gentle and studious habits, which at once rendered them the admiration, and their parents the envy of the whole neighborhood. These youths were, as nearly as could be, of an age, and so strongly resembled each other in figure, mien, and countenance, that they were often by strangers supposed to be twins. But nature had not continued the resemblance in the structure of their minds. Here they differed totally. For, though both of virtuous habits, and high principles, their tastes and inclinations led them so wide apart in their search after happiness, that no two young men in Catania were less together than Tomaso and Antonio. The former, mild, placid, reserved, appeared to have something of hauteur in his demeanor, and kept himself much alone. He loved to converse with the spirits of the long dead, through those mystic characters which bind distant ages together; and as he rose by those means above his companions in knowledge, he, imperceptibly perhaps, imbibed some degree of contempt for them and their pursuits.

Antonio, on the other hand, loved to mingle much with persons of his own age, joined readily in the dance and the song, and had always a salutation and a smile for whomever he met. He was, accordingly, on all sides, the greater favorite. In fact, every one greeted Antonio with a friendly air and hearty embrace; and few pleasure parties were made up in which he was not included. Still, in the midst of all this diffusive geniality, he preserved almost unimpaired his love of study, and his heart remained untouched; while Tomaso had scarcely emerged from the region of boyhood, before his affections become entangled by the charms of Maddalena, a Mattei, his junior by a single year. This youthful passion he took no pains to conceal from his parents. On the contrary, from the native ingenuousness of his character, he often spoke to them in terms of high admiration of Maddalena, dwelling more, indeed, and more frequently, on the rare excellence of her mind

and temper, than on that bloom of external beauty in which she confessedly excelled all the ladies of Catania.

"It is seldom that persons so worthy of each other as Tomaso and Maddalena are brought by circumstances together; and still less frequently, when they have met and loved, are their hearts suffered by fortune to go along with their hands.

"A life such as theirs, promised to be diversified by few incidents, and seemed likely to proceed as it had begun, to the end. Each day appeared very much like the preceding. They were happy, and nothing more could be said of them. One evening, however, in the beginning of summer, Tomaso having passed nearly the whole day in a rural excursion with Maddalena and her sisters, stole forth with her, before bidding good night, into the garden, to terminate a conversation which, in persons situated as they were, appeared singularly absurd. It was, in fact, a discussion, altogether serious, of their misfortunes; though Providence had hitherto withheld from them the knowledge of what the word means. The human heart, however, is marvellously inventive in the matter of calamities; and in the midst of thrilling and gushing delight, seems, like the nightingale, to lean voluntarily against some thorn, as if by self-torture to disarm the Nemesis, who unwillingly beholds man soaring towards that felicity which belongs properly to higher natures.

"I am very far from being happy, love!" said Tomaso. "My heart bounds and flutters at I know not what indelible apprehension. It seems as if I should lose you yet, either through my own fault or yours. I can, indeed, see no reason, and know no cause for this fear: which, nevertheless hangs like a cloak over my imagination, and assuredly your tone and manner this evening, have been ill calculated to expel it."

"Them I have lost my labor," answered Maddalena.

"But to what did your labors tend?"
"Towards dispelling your gloom. But, instead of effecting my purpose, I have myself caught the infection. This, however, may arise from our perfect congeniality of nature; for, perhaps, in the moral atmosphere, as in the physical, plants of the same kind are always simultaneously affected, and droop or flourish together."

"It may possibly be so," answered Tomaso, musingly.

"And yet," continued continued Maddalena, "it were but reasonable to expect to be cheerful on such a night as this; for assuredly nature was never more lovely. Look upward, Tomaso, on the left. Behold how the evening star glitters between those two horns of the mountain, like a distant beacon gleaming down a deep valley. And see, too, how in the cloudless east, the moon floats upward through the ether, appearing to diffuse around a warmth with her pearly rays, and weaving about the crests of the rocks and forests a wreath of radiance, like that which trembles yonder on the sea. I feel, too, in the air, a glow balminess like that of noon; somewhat oppressive indeed, but sweet, and abundantly welcome in the present state of my feelings."

"And see the cause, love!" exclaimed Tomaso, "in yonder prodigious column of black smoke, intermingled with ruddy flame, which has just reared its crest above the edge of the crater. Heavens! how it surges upward! It seems as if it would devour the stars. There will certainly be an eruption to-night, though neither thunders nor earthquakes have come before to announce its approach. But the heat we feel is as true a signal."

"Nay, but it may end in nothing, as such appearances often do," replied Maddalena. "And yet, indeed, the volume of vapors is unusually vast. But what a grand spectacle! Never was Gibello more beautiful. The black trunk of smoke springs upward through the gigantic foliage of flame, like the stem of an alga amidst its leaves. Ah! Holy Virgin! the wind is rising and driving it, in

a pitchy flood in this direction. It will presently be over our heads—and—oh! but hark! they call within, and you must leave me, Tomaso."

"Maddalena! Maddalena!"
"Subito Francisco, subito! There, now they are growing impatient. Pray, love, go; and let me see you to-morrow."

"They parted, and Tomaso went his way, slowly and unwillingly, for the gloom which he had complained of at the beginning of the evening, still hung heavily on his mind. It happened that their dwellings stood at nearly opposite extremities of the city, so that he had a considerable distance to go, and as he walked slowly, it was perhaps an hour before he reached home.

"Old Matteo, the major domo, or rather factotum of the house, had sat up for him, and had sought to keep off the attacks of sleep by taking a practical lesson in meteorology. In other words he had been watching the mountain, and observing it belch forth more fire and smoke than appeared to him consistent with a healthy state of the stomach, he felt persuaded it would be clearing out in the course of the night—a suspicion which he very frankly communicated to his young master.

"I can't pretend," said he, "that I at all admire the looks of the thing. There is something ugly about that smoke. Depend upon it there is mischief afoot. The very stars look sick if they get the smallest whiff of it up their nostrils; and I am sure I would much rather they than I, for it must be an infernal dose."

"Good Matteo go to bed, replied Tomaso. "You have been watching until you are half asleep, and the hour of dreams is already begun."

"Very true, my young master; and I row many are now dreaming who will not be at the same sport to-morrow night. I remember the eruption that destroyed the village of Cava.—The old mountain began opening his jaws exactly as he does at this moment—first blowing the smoke on one side that he might see his way down the cliffs, and find out in what direction he could best spout forth the lava which made him uneasy in the inside—and before morning nine hundred honest people had been roasted to a cinder."

"Ah! and are appearances now as bad as then?"

"Worse, by a great deal. For even while we are talking, I see the edges of the crater reddening, like those of frying-pan, which a cook has forgotten, half full of oil upon the fire."

The alarming symptoms, however, were not of long duration. The smoke diminished—the flames shrunk back within the crater—no thunders were heard, nor did the earthquake, that ancient concomitant of violent explosions, announce the near approach of an eruption. Matteo owned himself at fault, and wishing the Gibello a good night, comfortably put on his nightgown, and advised Tomaso to do the same. But the lover had secretly determined to watch, and with this view, placed himself in an arm-chair, near his open bed-room window, which commanded a view of the fortifications on the land side, and over the whole of that broad hollow slope extending from the base of Etna to the city. Several times, as he gazed on the terrific scene, fresh causes of alarm appeared to present themselves. Dusky clouds, while he marked them not, had gathered overhead. Bright flashes shot up from time to time, from the crater, and crimsoned the clouds, which seemed to open their bosoms, and allow them to pass heavenward. Then darkness, deep as that of Egypt, would wrap the whole prospect from his sight and produce a correspondingly however, assumed by degrees, the form of mere reveries, which at length terminated in sound sleep.

"How long he continued in this state is not known. It must have been at least some hours, as we may infer from what took place. When he was roused, it was by the shock of

an earthquake, so abrupt and violent that the chair on which he reclined seemed to be raised from the floor. He started to his feet, and looking around him, knew not, for a moment, where he was. The chamber was filled with thick smoke, and a ruddy glare, as from the mouth of a furnace, entered through the window. On recovering, in some degree, his self-possession, he looked forth, and beheld a spectacle strange beyond measure, and terrific, met his eye. A flood of fire, issuing forth a tremendous gap in one of the inferior craters having already precipitated itself down the heights, was rolling far and wide over the inclined plane on which Catania stands, and the first waves of the torrent, swelling upward like the bore of the Indus, was even now within a few score yards of the ramparts. Cries, meanwhile and shouts, and wailings, and lamentations, mingling in confused murmurs, as when a capital city, with all its matrons and maidens, had fallen by storm, filled his ear. Upon the broad expanse lying between him and the wall, dark clouds of human beings were sweeping along; while the voice of priests, chanting a hurried *De Profundis*, was, here and there, audible above the groans and sobs of the multitude. Numerous groups had formed in various parts upon the platform, and, as their dusky figures stood relieved against the blood-red glowing lava that covered the plain, he could distinguish that some were lifting up their hands to heaven, others gazing in stupid amazement at the mountain; others clapping their children in their arms, seemed buried in deep despair. Still the fiery deluge, wave after wave, came pouring on, and even while he looked, it had reached and filled the moat, and begun to press upon the wall. At this silent horror arose from the multitude, and immediately the greater number fled. Scattered at intervals on the distance, trees, detached houses, and small hamlets were on fire, and the flames of these diminutive conflagrations, light hued and aspiring upward, contrasted, in a very striking manner, with the dark, sullen lava, glowing like a sea of motion iron, but yielding no flame. Above, instead of the lofty, clear transparent roof of ether, fretted with stars and constellations, which he had viewed with delight on the preceding evening, an awning, pitchy black, but reflecting the saugine glare of the lava hung low over the earth, and seemed to have contracted the horizon to the resemblance of a subterranean vault, through which the lightning flashed, and the thunder pealed, and the earthquake vibrated along, with a rumbling sound more terrible still.

Tomaso's first thought, when the power to reflect had returned was of Maddalena. Could he save and fly with her? Would there be time before all Catania should be on fire to reach her dwelling, and snatch her from swift-striking perdition?—As the question flashed through his mind, he rushed forth into the corridor, and was hurrying towards the great staircase, when a light streaming into the passage through the half open door of his mother's chamber, arrested his movements. Whither was he going? The author of his days lay there buried in sleep, which, if he fulfilled his actual intention would presently be death. There, enfeebled by age, where the hands that had nursed him—there the knees on which his helpless infancy had reposed—there the lips which had taught his own to move in expressions of fondness and joy, and the eyes in whose once bright orbs he had first beheld his own image reflected. The spirit of childhood came back upon him. He thought of the deep fountain of a mother's love. His breast throbed with the feeling, the noblest and purest which the heart of man knows, that binds the child to the parent, and the parent to the child. Every vestige of selfishness fell away like bonds of tow from about his soul. He saw what was his duty, and determined to perform it. Yet not, it must be confessed, without a struggle. Apprehensions for Maddalena shook his best resolves, and kept him, for some moments inactive.